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February 22, 2002

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 - INSURANCE
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Chairman Michael Powell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554
Federal Communications Commission
Office of Secretary

01-348

Re: Docket #01-348

Dear Chairman Powell:

The purpose of my letter is to state that I believe that the proposed merger between EchoStar and Hughes Electronics could bring unique and exciting benefits to our rural constituents.

The benefits to consumers will mean more programming choices and competitive pricing. This merger, if approved by the F.C.C. and D.O.J., will provide an excellent alternative to cable TV. Today cable TV controls nearly 80% of the pay television household market with little or no competition. Real competition will only keep rapidly growing cable prices down and will serve as an incentive for them to give the consumer better service.

The underserved rural areas will also benefit from the merger because of the potential use of interactive TV and broadband Internet access in schools and businesses. The cost to install cable in rural areas is very high, and Direct Broadcast Satellite TV is relatively inexpensive. The infrastructure for the merger is already in place.

Let us bridge the digital divide that exists between urban and rural communities. This merger is pro-consumer, pro-competition, and pro-economy. I urge you to review the facts and support the merger.

Best Regards,

Jerry Thomas
Jerry A. Thomas, M.D.
Louisiana State Senate- District 12

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